

BUO GIORNO !

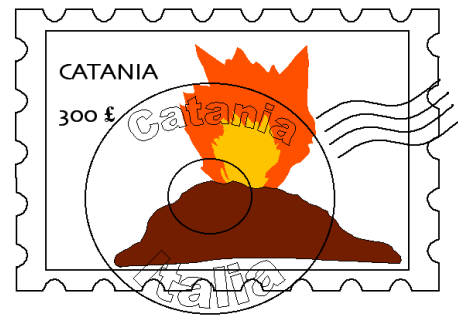
My name is Lucia, and I am from the small town of Catania on the island of Sicily. If you've never seen a map of Italy before, Italy looks like a giant boot and Sicily looks like a rock that's being kicked by



Mount Etna is an active volcano on the east coast of Sicily, Italy.

a mile from me. We have a university here and over 330,000 people!

People live here because of the good soil quality. The soil is rich in nutrients because it is composed of old lava and ash that have erupted from the volcano over the past 300,000 years. This kind of land attracts farmers. My family has farmed the land here for generations. People here grow olives, grapevines, other fruits, and all kinds of vegetables. We also raise different kinds of trees, such as chestnut, beech, oak and pine. Currently we have olives, grapevines, lemons, limes, and of course lots of vegetables that we take to the farmers' market each week to sell. We also recently planted some small chestnut trees. They should have chestnuts ready for harvest in a few years. Have you ever cooked fresh chestnuts over a fire on a cold winter night? If you haven't, you're missing out!



the boot! I

hear you're all very interested in Mount Etna, a volcano on the east coast of our island, so let me tell you a little about the mountain and our island.

My entire family lives right at the base of Mount Etna! Scary, isn't it? Can you imagine living at the bottom of a 3,350 m (10,991 ft) volcano that has erupted more than 190 times since 1500 B.C? But it's not scary at all. Mount Etna (which is not too far from Mt. Vesuvius, located on the Italian mainland) isn't in some remote, unpopulated area like many volcanoes around the world. In fact, there are tons of people living at its base. My sisters, Donna and Bianca, and I were born and raised in this town. My sisters are both married and live less than



Looking south along the coast of Sicily to Etna, taken during the 1993 eruption.

http://volcano.und.edu/vwdocs/volc_images/img_etna.html

Unfortunately, there's always this ancient mountain looming above us, threatening to go off at



Mt. Etna Volcano is one of the world's most active volcanoes. It has been erupting for over half a million years. Dormant periods at Mt. Etna are extremely rare. Although it can be very destructive, it isn't considered particularly dangerous.

<http://www.volcanolive.com/etna.html>

this mountain for all the unique history it has, along with all the tourists it attracts. I get to meet all sorts of people who come to look at Mount Etna. Sometimes, my mama says that the mountain is part of our family, and she calls it "the friendly giant."

However, the people in Catania have also had some pretty hard lessons in dealing with Mount Etna. Back in 1669, when Mount Etna had its worst known eruption, the townspeople tried to outsmart the volcano and build 18-meter high walls to keep the lava flow away from the town. Sadly, the plan didn't work and millions of metric tons of lava poured out of Mount Etna and completely destroyed Catania and a neighboring town of Nicolosi in just 18 days.

Hopefully, that will never happen again. Earthquakes are also a pressing concern around these parts. Sicily is a hotbed for seismic activity because of magma movement, with many small earthquakes occurring every year.

any second! You might be wondering how there can be such a large population right underneath an active volcano. Well, this volcano's eruptions affect only the area around its summit, far, far away from the base; we are pretty safe here. In the past 3,500 years, Mt. Etna has erupted 190 times, and only 7 of those eruptions have led to fatalities. One of the contributing factors to the low number of fatalities is the slow speed of the lava as it moves down the mountain, allowing people below enough time to evacuate the area.

Although small ash and steam eruption occur all the time, and it may seem like we live in constant fear of the great Mount Etna, we're quite carefree. In fact, we love



Many buildings have been built on old lava flows from Mount Etna.

<http://www.research.ibm.com/people/r/rish/images/CataniaMay00.jpg>



An ancient myth said that Typhon, a 100-headed monster, was trapped under Mount Etna by Zeus after he tried to rebel, and he has been spitting out his angry flames ever since.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1460293.stm>

Mt. Etna was once thought to be the highest peak on Earth! This has put Mt. Etna at the center of many mythological stories from the people of the area. There's the story of the great giant named Enceladus, who breathed fire (volcanic eruptions) and caused motion (earthquakes). He lived at Mount Etna along with the Cyclopes (the one-eyed monster). Early Romans also believed that the god of fire, Vulcan, lived at Mount Etna and used its hot lava as a way to forge weapons and armor for the other gods. Mt. Etna is also thought to have trapped an ancient, angry monster thousand of years ago. When the monster periodically lost his temper, he spurted spectacular columns of fire from one of his 100 dragon heads. My grandfather loved to tell these stories to my sisters and me when we were younger, and sometimes he still does!

Of course, scientists now know a lot more about Mt. Etna than these ancient cultures

did. Scientists believe that Mt. Etna has been an active volcano for more than two and half million years. It probably started as an underwater volcano and then rose above the surface.

So that's it! I hope my letter helped. I must be off now to pack so I can visit my cousin Benito, who lives in Naples (the closest large city to Mount Vesuvius.) He's agreed to take me on an exclusive tour, so I'm excited! Hope to hear from you soon.

Your pal,
Lucia Totti
38°N 15°E